

DISTRICTING COMMISSION
Wednesday, January 25, 2012, 5:30 p.m.
Armijo Public Library, Mural Room
620 E. 7th Street
El Paso, Texas 79901

Commissioners Present: 6

Vice-Chair Francisco X. Dominguez, John Karlsruher, David Thackston, Oscar Silva, James L. Graham, Alisa Jorgensen

Commissioners Absent: 3

Chair Gene Finke, Gilbert A. Mendez, Jr., Rodolfo Troncoso

Planning and Economic Development Staff:

David Coronado, Executive Secretary, Lead Planner; Todd Taylor, Planner; Mariano Soto, GIS Planner, Marissa Monroy, Economic Development Coordinator; Donna Martinez, Secretary

Other Staff Present:

Marie Taylor, Assistant City Attorney, City Attorney's Office

1. Meeting Called to Order

Vice-Chair Francisco Dominguez welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m.

2. Establish Quorum

Quorum established.

3. Staff Presentation on Alternative Districting Plans

SPANISH TRANSLATION SERVICES

Prior to the presentation on alternative districting plans, Mr. Coronado announced Spanish translation services were available for members of the public.

Mr. Coronado gave a PowerPoint presentation and explained that Commissioners voted to present three, of the 11 proposed maps, to the public for comment. Mr. Coronado then elaborated on the proposed boundary lines and precinct changes for each of the three maps, Plan A, Plan B and Plan C.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC DURING THE PRESENTATION

1. Mr. George Ybarra asked about the small patches of brown that were located near District 5.

Mr. Coronado explained that it was land not annexed into the city but surrounded by the city.

2. Mr. John W. Vandeven, Jr. asked about a jagged boundary line on the maps.

Mr. Coronado explained the boundary line was Montana Avenue which is the current boundary line for Districts 2, 3 and 5.

3. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked if District 4 was a contiguous District particularly concerning Precinct 55.

Mr. Coronado responded that the precinct lines were laid out by the County of El Paso. Because Castner Range is federally owned property, it is not annexed into the City, and is not assigned to a District, but is still a part of Precinct 55.

Mr. Martinez stated that he had not seen the portion of the Precinct on the left hand side of the first map and it did not look contiguous.

Commissioner Thackston explained that it is not contiguous in Plan A.

Mr. Coronado concurred with Commissioner Thackston's comment and added that that is a change that will have to be addressed.

4. Mr. John W. Vandeven, Jr asked who lives in the area that connects Fred Wilson to Airport Road and answered that it was a rhetorical question; the answer is nobody.

Mr. Coronado explained that it is the same with Castner Range and the way that the precincts were laid out by the County but that it is included because we have to include all city annexed land.

5. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked Mr. Coronado to show the boundary lines for Precinct 88.

Mr. Coronado showed Precinct 88 and noted that there are eight residents in that Precinct.

4. Call for Public Comment

Mr. Coronado explained a sign in sheet was available for those who wished to ask questions of Staff and/or Commissioners. Additionally, for those who did not want to speak, but would like to leave their comments, public comment sheets were also available.

PUBLIC COMMENT SPEAKERS

1. Mr. Joe Gutierrez did not wish to speak at this time. Mr. Coronado called the next speaker, Mr. Sebastian Martinez; however, Mr. Gutierrez then changed his mind.

Mr. Gutierrez asked about revising the boundary lines for Districts 1, 8 and 3 in Plan A

Commissioner Graham asked if Mr. Gutierrez just had questions, or was he making suggestions.

Mr. Coronado thought Mr. Gutierrez suggested shifting District 8 to the north; changing the boundary lines between Districts 8 and 1.

Mr. Mancera interjected, no, he was specifically addressing Districts 8 and 3.

Commissioner Graham asked if Mr. Gutierrez could explain the rationale, or reasoning or the concern that he might have; Commissioners want to hear his concerns.

Mr. Gutierrez responded that he was concerned with the way District 8 currently looks, and how it stretches from one extreme to the other—from the Willows, Country Club area to where we are now.

Mr. Coronado asked if Mr. Gutierrez would come up and point at the areas he would like to shift between Districts.

Mr. Gutierrez again asked about the boundary lines for Districts 8 and 3 in Plan A.

Commissioner Graham asked Mr. Gutierrez to generally state his concerns about District 8 and 3.

Mr. Gutierrez stated that he didn't see the right balance of representation in District 8 with the representative covering one extreme area in the northwest all the way down here to where we are now.

Commissioner Thackston asked Mr. Gutierrez how he would propose these changes.

Mr. Gutierrez responded he would have to look at it a little bit more.

Commissioner Thackston suggested that Mr. Gutierrez could create his own map.

Mr. Gutierrez responded that he likes the way Plan A looks, however, he had concerns regarding the length of District 8.

2. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked if the proposed maps were based on current Precinct lines and asked if they will stay the same in case the State Representative lines are changed.

Mr. Coronado responded that that may happen.

Mr. Martinez asked if all these maps that were shown are preliminary.

Mr. Coronado responded that if the State make changes to the Precinct lines, Staff will make the necessary adjustments before anything goes before City Council.

Mr. Martinez clarified that that would not require a complete remapping; some of the lines may just move a street or two.

Mr. Martinez stated in regards to Plan C, in which District 2 goes from the Border all the way to Hondo Pass, that it is totally out of character with the population. In his opinion, Plan A basically stays within the current boundary lines, satisfies the population imbalance and probably would be the Plan that City Council would favor.

Vice-Chair Dominguez asked Mr. Martinez what he meant by District 2 being out of character in Plan C

Mr. Martinez responed that the populations of the areas have very little in common with each other in terms of ethnicity and economics.

Vice-Chair Dominguez stated that one of the questions that has come up is about the commonality between where we are now and the Upper Valley.

Mr. Martinez responded that obviously the areas do not have anything in common with each other.

3. Mr. Tom Homsley, resident of Precinct 31, stated that the Kern Place area should be left in District 1 because it is a community, it takes in UTEP, and removing it would throw the neighborhood into a different atmosphere. Mr. Tom preferred Plan C, where District 8 gets the population needed in the Northwest.
4. Mr. Esvaldo Velos, representing the Southside, suggested changing the boundary lines for Districts 1 and 8.

Commissioner Thackston asked if Mr. Velos is proposing to move District 1 to the north, and noted that the District 8 Mr. Velos is describing would cross both sides of the mountain.

Mr. Velos agreed with Commissioner Thackston and explained that south El Paso's commonality is its history. South El Paso does not have much in common with the upper Westside.

Mr. Coronado invited Mr. Velos to come down to the Planning Department and create his own map.

5. Mr. Richard Teschner, resident of Rim Area, addressed the boundaries of Districts 1 and 8 and advocated strongly in favor of a revised version of Plan C. He suggested that District 8 expand upward to include Precincts 6, 7, and 8 and that District 8 lose some of the Precincts that border District 3.

He was impressed with some of the comments Mr. Velos made regarding the history of the Districts and the importance of putting neighborhoods with the same history in the same District. District 1 has always included the Rim Area, Kern Place, Mission Hills and UTEP. He suggested that the District 8 boundary line be Doniphan, as far north as Artcraft Road to include Precincts, 7, 6 and 5, all the Upper Valley to the west of Doniphan plus a little bit north of Artcraft. He envisioned moving other Precincts into District 8, retaining Rim Area, Kern and Mission Hills in District 1, taking some of the eastern most Precincts from District 8 and moving them into District 2 and, perhaps, District 3. The Mesa Street corridor has always been a District 1 corridor and he would like to keep it that way.

6. Mr. James Vandeven, Jr. stated that Plan A was the best map because it had less gerrymandering, straighter lines and was the least complicated. He explained people can get confused and don't know where to vote, but may not be if the lines are neat, straight and clean.
7. Ms. Rose Cabrera, resident of Segundo Barrio, explained that the residents of South El Paso do not have anything in common with residents of the Willows and the Country Club area. South El Paso is underrepresented. She would like Precincts 36 and 37 to be better represented.

Commissioner Thackston asked how Ms. Cabrera would have drawn the boundary lines.

Ms. Cabrera explained that she sat down with Planning Staff and created a map for Commissioners to review at the February 22nd Districting Commission meeting.

Mr. Richard Teschner responded to Ms. Cabrera's statements by saying that he has always been surprised that the Upper Valley has been divided into two Districts because it has commonalities such as flooding, insurance, mosquitos and street issues, specifically Country Club Road. Mr. Teschner stated that everything to the west of Doniphan in the North Upper Valley should be joined with the South Upper Valley into District 8.

8. Mr. Sebastian Martinez spoke again and asked Commissioners to consider a Plan with the least number of boundary line changes.

5. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:51 p.m. Staff will remain to answer any questions you may have.